

The Wiesenthal Files: What the Documents Reveal about Simon Wiesenthal's Past

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Chapter 1: Simon Wiesenthal's War Years: New Doubts

Simon Wiesenthal is the world's most famous "Nazi"-hunter. His claim to have brought Adolf Eichmann and more than a thousand other Third-Reich "war criminals" to justice has become the stuff of popular myth, familiar to tens of millions through his own writings as well as through fictionalized treatments of his career in bestselling thrillers and film and television hits.

Wiesenthal's activities and example, more than those of any other man, have kept alive and institutionalized the international drive to track down and punish Germans and others alleged to have persecuted Jews during the Second World War. Few men of the postwar era have been honored as frequently as has Wiesenthal: a list of his decorations, medals, orders, and honorary degrees, including a special gold medal awarded by the U.S. Congress and presented him by a teary-eyed President Jimmy Carter, would fill two pages in this journal.

Fundamental to Simon Wiesenthal's moral authority as a "Nazi"-hunter, and serving also as the basis for his expertise on the crimes and criminals of Axis Europe, has been the story of his experiences at the hands of the Germans during the war. According to Wiesenthal's public account of his war years, as told in his *The Murderers Among Us*, and repeated in countless speeches and interviews, he endured almost continual suffering as a German prisoner from July 1941 to May 1945, when he was liberated by American troops at Mauthausen. His time as a concentration camp inmate and "slave" laborer, his numerous narrow escapes from execution by his captors, and his

witness to countless crimes and atrocities carried out against other Jews stamp him not merely as a survivor but as an accuser and avenger.

While doubts and even accusations have been raised in the past as to Wiesenthal's conduct during the war years, there has so far been no hard evidence made public in support of allegations, frequently raised, that Wiesenthal "collaborated" with the Germans. Nor, to our knowledge, has an exhaustive comparison of Wiesenthal's separate statements on his wartime experiences been undertaken.

New Evidence

Last spring IHR was able to obtain a certified copy of a transcript of an interrogation which took place on two consecutive days, May 27 and May 28, 1948. [1] The interrogator was Curt Ponger; the man Ponger was questioning, Simon Wiesenthal. The interrogation is described as having been brought about by (*auf Veranlassung von*) a Mr. Niederman, and was recorded stenographically by M. Fritsche. There is no indication of the place where the interrogation took place.

The transcript of that portion of the interrogation which took place on May 27, between 11 and 12 o'clock, runs to nine-and-a-half, double-spaced, typewritten, 8 1/2 x 11-inch pages. That of the following day, which was conducted between 11:30 and 12 o'clock (both times are presumably A.M., although this is not explicitly stated) covers nearer seven pages identical in size and format to the transcript of the first day's interrogation.

The May 27 transcript consists of twenty-eight questions and answers, that of May 28, twenty questions and answers. Answer No. 4 of the first day's interrogation is this statement by Simon Wiesenthal: "I swear by the Almighty and All-knowing God that I will say the absolute truth, conceal nothing and add nothing, so help me God". ("Ich schwör bei Gott dem Allmächtigen und Allwissenden, dass ich die reine Wahrheit sagen, nichts verschweigen und nichts hinzufügen werde, so wahr mir Gott helfe").

Discrepancies

Among the sworn statements made by Simon Wiesenthal during this investigation are:

- that he was employed as a "Soviet chief engineer in Lvov [in German: Lemberg; in Polish: Lwow; in Ukrainian: Lviv] and Odessa" during the Soviet occupation of September 1939-June 1941;
- that he served as first a lieutenant and then a major in a Soviet partisan unit following his escape from German custody in October 1943;
- that he was about to be executed by the Germans as a partisan leader but was able to save his life by joining a group of Jews in German custody.

These sworn statements conflict with Simon Wiesenthal's account of his wartime years presented in *The Murderers Among Us*, his published memoirs, and with certain other sworn statements Wiesenthal has made regarding his war years. The above discrepancies, and a number of others evident when Wiesenthal's several accounts of his activities between September 1939 and May 1945 are compared, raise grave doubts as to the "Nazi"-hunter's credibility, and prompt a further question: What did Simon Wiesenthal actually do during the Second World War?

Three Stories Compared

In the following pages we have attempted a preliminary comparison of three different reports, each of which is an authoritative statement by Simon Wiesenthal. The reports are:

- the 1948 interrogation of Wiesenthal described above;
- a sworn statement which Wiesenthal submitted to the West German government when applying for reparations in 1954;[\[2\]](#)
- and the account of his wartime years which appears in *The Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs*, published in English in 1967.[\[3\]](#)

It should be stated at the outset that the aim in comparing these statements is not to attempt to impeach Wiesenthal's credibility by fastening on unimportant differences in detail, or by stressing omissions which may be understandable in view of the differing length and purpose of these documents. Nor is it implied that any of Simon Wiesenthal's statements, even when corresponding in the several documents, is to be taken at face value.

The Period September 1939-June 1941

During this period Simon Wiesenthal claims to have been a resident of Lvov, the metropolis of Galicia, which had been part of post-World-War-I Poland until, in consequence of the partition of Poland agreed on by Germany and the USSR in August 1939, it was occupied by the Soviets the following month.

According to *The Murderers Among Us*, Wiesenthal, as a "bourgeois" Jew (with his own architectural practice), ran the danger of being arrested by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police. We learn that both his stepfather and his stepbrother were arrested: the stepfather later died in jail and the stepbrother was eventually shot by the Soviets. The account of Wiesenthal's time under Soviet rule continues:

The Russians issued many "bourgeois" Jews so-called Paragraph 11 passports, which made them underprivileged, second-class citizens, not permitted to live in larger cities or within a hundred kilometers of any border. They lost good jobs and had their bank accounts confiscated. Proving himself a resourceful man under pressure, Wiesenthal bribed an NKVD commissar and obtained regular passports for himself, his wife, and his mother. A few months later, all Jews with "Paragraph 11" passports were deported to Siberia, where many died. The Wiesenthals managed to stay in Lwow, but Wiesenthal's days as an independent architect were over. He was glad to find a badly paid job as a mechanic in a factory that produced bedsprings. [\[4\]](#)

Wiesenthal gives a rather different statement as to his position under the Soviet regime in his 1948 interrogation. There he sums up his activities during the Soviet occupation in these words: "... between 1939-1941 Soviet chief engineer working in Lvov and Odessa" ("... zwischen 1939-1941 sowjetischer Hauptingenieur in Lemberg und Odessa"). [\[5\]](#)

These two contrasting statements suggest several questions. Is the evident discrepancy to be accounted for by Wiesenthal's desire to present himself in his memoirs, published during the "Cold War," as primarily a victim of the Soviet regime, who narrowly escaped the fate of his stepfamily? Has he lied about the badly paid job as a mechanic in a factory that produced bedsprings? If it is true that Wiesenthal avoided deportation to Siberia for himself, his wife, and his mother by bribing an NKVD commissar, how much more might this "bourgeois" Jew have had to pay to obtain a

position as a "Soviet chief engineer"? Or, finally, are we to understand that Wiesenthal's "collaboration" with the Soviet invaders was occasioned by a mutual sympathy between the Jewish "bourgeois" and the Communist invaders?

Escape from Lvov to the Partisans (?), October 1943

On June 22, 1941 the Germans and their allies invaded the Soviet Union; eight days later the first Germans entered Lvov. Just before they left, the Soviet authorities had massacred several thousand political opponents in the city's prisons. Most of the victims were Ukrainian nationalists, and the discovery of the slaughter unleashed a pogrom of epic proportions against the Jews of Lvov, who were hated by many of the city's Poles and Ukrainians for their Soviet sympathies and for their enthusiastic cooperation with the NKVD. [6]

Simon Wiesenthal came into the hands of the Germans in early July 1941, by his telling. The three statements compared in this article mention at least two different arrests, one by Ukrainian auxiliary police, after which Wiesenthal claims to have narrowly escaped death; the other by soldiers of the Wehrmacht, who rounded up Wiesenthal and other Jews for hard labor at the railway yard. Here is not the place to analyze the conflicting accounts or to evaluate their credibility; nor to examine in depth Wiesenthal's stories as to his activities from July 1941 to October 1943, during which time he claims to have worked, first as a sign-painter, then as a draftsman, at the Ostbahn Ausbesserungswerk (Eastern Railroad Repair Works -- OAW). For the purposes of this study it is enough to state that in his memoirs, Wiesenthal claims to have been in close co-operation with the Polish underground while at the OAW, and to have supplied them with detailed maps showing the vulnerable points of the Lvov railway junction. [7] He further alleges that he became so friendly with a sympathetic National Socialist superior, Oberinspektor Adolf Kohlrautz, that Kohlrautz permitted Wiesenthal to conceal two pistols in his (Kohlrautz's) desk. [8]

According to the shortest account of his escape and recapture, Wiesenthal's 1954 sworn application for reparations:

On October 17, 1943, immediately before the imminent liquidation of the Lvov camp, I fled from the camp and hid myself in a barn at acquaintances in the vicinity of Lvov. On January 13, 1944, on the occasion of a close search of this locality by the SD and Gestapo, I was discovered and committed to the Lacki Gestapo prison in Lvov.

(Am 17. Oktober 1943, unmittelbar vor der bevorstehenden Liquidierung des Lagers Lemberg flüchtete ich vom Lager und hielt mich in einer Scheune bei Bekannten in der Nähe von Lemberg versteckt. Am 13. Jänner 1944 anlässlich der Durchkämmung dieser Ortschaft durch SD und Gestapo wurde ich entdeckt und in das Gestapogefängnis Lacki in Lemberg eingeliefert.) [9]

That there is little chance of a casual mistake in the dates is shown by an affidavit which immediately follows the reparations application:

I hereby affirm in lieu of oath that I was interned in the Lvov forced labor camp from October 20, 1941 until my escape on October 17, 1943.

I further affirm that -- after I was caught -- I was in custody on January 13, 1944 until March 19, 1944 in the Gestapo prison in Lvov on Lacki Street.

(Ich versichere hiermit an Eides statt, daß ich -- im Zwangsarbeitslager Lemberg vom

20. Oktober 1941 bis zu meiner Flucht am 17. Oktober 1943 inhaftiert war.

Weiters versichere ich, daß ich -- nachdem ich aufgegriffen wurde -- am 13. Jänner 1944 bis zum 19. März 1944 im Gestapogefängnis in Lemberg auf der Lacki-Straße in Haft war.) [\[10\]](#)

In each of the other two Wiesenthal statements under analysis, the "Nazi"-hunter claims to have escaped from German custody in Lvov on October 2, 1943. The date of his recapture is given in both these statements as *June* 13, 1944, exactly five months later than the date claimed in Wiesenthal's reparations application. Other than this agreement as to dates, Wiesenthal's 1948 interrogation and his memoirs differ in virtually every particular.

According to Wiesenthal's memoirs, in late September 1943 Wiesenthal and the other Jews working at the OAW were ordered to be sent under guard nightly to the Lvov (Lemberg) concentration camp. Sensing his impending doom, Wiesenthal prepared his escape. The obliging Kohlrautz, "who often permitted him to go to town to buy drafting supplies," arranged for Wiesenthal to be accompanied by a "stupid-looking Ukrainian" policeman on a shopping expedition with Arthur Scheiman, another Jewish inmate. Naturally Kohlrautz permitted Wiesenthal to retrieve the two pistols he had hidden in the "good Nazi"'s desk.

After giving their escort the slip, Wiesenthal and Scheiman repaired to the Lvov apartment of a friend in the "Polish underground" (precisely which political affiliation is left unstated). After some days of concealment there and in Scheiman's house in the country, Wiesenthal and Scheiman found shelter in an apartment of other "friends," where the two hid out under the floorboards until their recapture. Wiesenthal possessed not only arms but a diary and "a list of SS guards and their crimes that he'd compiled, believing that one day it might be useful." On the evening of June 13, 1944 Wiesenthal was discovered under the floor, in possession of his pistol, diary, and list of SS men by two Polish plainclothes detectives and an SS man. Thus Wiesenthal's story as presented in *The Murderers Among Us*. [\[11\]](#)

On May 27, 1948 Wiesenthal told Curt Ponger under sworn oath that: "On October 2, 1943 [having] fled from Janovska [or Lemberg] concentration camp; I [joined?] a partisan group which operated in the Tarnopol-Kamenopodolsk area" ("Am 2. Oktober 1943 vom K.L. Janovska geflüchtet, habe ich mich an eine Partisanengruppe, welche in den Raum Tarnopol-Kamenopodolsk operiert hat"). [\[12\]](#)

During the next day's interrogation session, Wiesenthal went into much more detail. Aside from facing Ukrainian police formations and the Ukrainian-manned SS "Galicia" division, Wiesenthal's unit fought mostly against partisans from the UPA, or Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the military arm of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. According to Wiesenthal, as the Germans fell back and the front moved nearer at the start of 1944, the situation in his sector grew so chaotic that Soviet aircraft sometimes bombed his unit by mistake. With four or five different partisan groups at large in the same territory, "In January 1944 there was such confusion that one didn't know who was for him and who was against him. Whoever so much as stuck his head out of the woods would be shot at" ("Es war im Januar 1944 so ein Durcheinander, dass man nicht wusste, wer mit wem und wer gegen wen war. Wer nur seinen Kopf aus dem Wald streckte, auf den wurde geschossen"). [\[13\]](#)

After informing his interrogator that his partisan unit paid local farmers in dollars for provisions, Wiesenthal was asked: "Where did you get the dollars?" ("Woher bekamen Sie die Dollar?"). He answered as follows:

The Russian partisans had dollars, usually 100-dollar bills. We buried at least 70-80

thousand dollars. In any event the Russian liaison man with us always had enough dollars available ... (Die russischen Partisanen haben Dollar gehabt, meistenteils 100-Dollarstuecke. Wir haben mindestens 70-80 Tausend Dollarnoten vergraben. Jedenfalls der russische Verbindungsman, der mit uns war, hat immer genug Dollar zur Verfuegung gehabt...)[\[14\]](#)

Asked about the rank he held, Wiesenthal answered this way:

I had a high rank, I was immediately made a lieutenant on the basis of my intellect, then was promoted to major, and finally the commander said "If you come through this alive, then you're a lieutenant colonel." I helped very much in building bunkers and fortification lines. We had fabulous bunker constructions. My rank was not so much as a strategic expert as a technical expert.

(Ich hatte einen hohen Rang. Ich kam direkt dorthin auf Grund des Intelligenzgrades als Leutnant, dann wurde ich zum Major befoerdert und zum Schluss sagte der Kommandierende, "wenn du die Sache ueberlebst, dann bist du Ober[st]leutnant." Ich habe sehr viel mitgeholfen beim Bau der Bunker und Befestigungslien. Wir haben grossartige Bunkerkonstruktionen gehabt. Mein Grad war nicht soviel als strategischer Fachmann wie als technischer Fachmann.) [\[15\]](#)

Although Wiesenthal never states explicitly the affiliation of his partisan unit, it seems clear from his remarks that it was part of the Armia Ludowa (People's Army), the Soviet-organized and -manned "Polish" guerrilla force. After his unit was surrounded in February, and forced to split up and escape through the German lines, Wiesenthal describes being hidden by friends in Lvov as follows:

We knew addresses, KIGNI --- was the liaison man between AK and us. The sharp differences between AK and AL didn't exist yet. AK was nationalist and antisemitic and AL was not antisemitic. AK thus took in Jews in Lemberg, since the pressure of the Germans in Lvov was much stronger than in any other district.

(Wir wussten Adressen, KIGNI --- war der Verbindungsman zwischen AK und uns. Die krassen Unterschiede zwischen AK und AL war noch nicht. AK war national und antisemitisch und AL war nicht antisemitisch. AK hat in Lemberg deshalb Juden aufgenommen, weil der Druck der Deutschen in Lemberg viel staerker war wie in irgendeinem anderen Gebiet.) [\[16\]](#)

From the context, and in view of Wiesenthal's earlier statements concerning his unit, as to "the Russian partisans" and "the Russian liaison man," "us" in the above passage would seem to refer to the AL, the military arm of the Communist regime the Soviets were to install in Poland at the end of the war.

Whatever the precise identity of the partisan group Wiesenthal claims to have served in, the question remains: Which, if any, of Wiesenthal's accounts of what he was doing between October 1943 and June (or is it January) 1944 is to be believed?

In the Hands of the Gestapo(?)

As has been mentioned, Wiesenthal claims in his memoirs to have been recaptured in an apartment in Lvov, with a pistol, a diary, and a list of SS men and their crimes, by two Polish detectives and

an SS man on June 13, 1944. This version contrasts markedly with Wiesenthal's affirmation in 1954 that his recapture took place in a barn near Lemberg, where he claims to have been discovered by the Gestapo and the SD (Sicherheitsdienst, the security service of the German National Socialist Workers' Party) on January 13, 1944 (see above).

That Wiesenthal's sworn 1948 account of his recapture differs, once more, from his other stories will by now probably not surprise the reader. To be sure, his 1948 version exhibits similarities to that in *The Murderers Among Us*: he is captured, armed, hiding under the floor in an apartment in Lvov on June 13, 1944. According to his 1948 interrogation, however, Wiesenthal had on him not a diary and a list of SS misdeeds, but "different notes," "certain notes regarding the entire partisan area of operations" ("verschiedene Aufzeichnungen," "gewisse Aufzeichnungen ueber das gesamte Partisanengebiet"). [\[17\]](#)

Both in 1948 and when composing his memoirs, Wiesenthal was quite conscious that the fate of an escaped Jew who had fallen into the hands of the Germans in 1944 armed with a pistol and either a list of SS war criminals or detailed notes on partisan activity would be regarded as rather precarious. In the memoirs, Wiesenthal is taken to a police outpost on Smolki Square, where he has his first bit of good fortune, for unbeknownst to the SS man, a venal Polish policeman relieves him of his pistol: "If a German had found the gun, he would have shot Wiesenthal at once."

Then:

From Smolki Square, Wiesenthal was taken back to the concentration camp. Only a few Jews had survived: tailors, shoemakers, plumbers -- artisans the SS still needed for a while. Wiesenthal knew that after reading his diary and his list of SS torturers with specific details, the Gestapo would have enough evidence to hang him ten times. [\[18\]](#)

According to both his memoirs and his 1948 interrogation, Wiesenthal staved off a quick execution by slashing his wrists. Even then, according to his 1948 version, it was his notes on partisan operations which saved him:

... I owe it especially to this circumstance that I wasn't killed immediately like so many Jews, since the notes appeared to be very valuable and therefore I entered the hospital after my suicide attempt. It was very rare that a Jew was admitted to a prison hospital.

(... diesem Umstand verdanke ich speziell, dass ich nicht gleich wie soviele Juden umgelegt wurde, denn die Aufzeichnungen schienen sehr wertvoll zu sein und darum kam ich in ein Gefaengnisspital, nach dem von mir veruebten Selbstmordversuch. Das war ein sehr seltener Fall, dass ein Jude in ein Gefaengnisspital kam.) [\[19\]](#)

In *The Murderers Among Us* Wiesenthal's suicide attempt is prompted by the appearance of SS Oberscharführer Oskar Waltke, "perhaps the most feared man in Lvov." Waltke, against whom Wiesenthal testified at his 1962 trial in Germany, is described in the following chilling terms:

Waltke, a cold, mechanical sadist, was in charge of the Gestapo's Jewish Affairs Section in Lwow. His speciality was to make Jews with false Polish papers confess they were Jews. He tortured his victims until they made the admission and then he sent them to be shot. He also tortured many Gentiles until they admitted to being Jews just to get it over with. Waltke's name had been on Wiesenthal's private list, which Waltke must have studied with great interest. Wiesenthal knew that Waltke wouldn't simply have him shot. He would first submit him to his very special treatment. As Wiesenthal was led into the dark courtyard where the truck from the Gestapo prison stood waiting, he took

out a small razor blade that he'd kept concealed in his cuff for such a moment.

"Get in, *Kindchen*, quick!" Waltke said.

With two fast movements, Wiesenthal cut both wrists. [20]

Thereafter, according to his memoirs, Wiesenthal is committed to the prison hospital, where two more suicide attempts fail. There he is restored to health with "a special diet of strong soups, liver, and vegetables" prescribed by the solicitous sadist Waltke so that he can get on with his "interrogation" all the more quickly.

If Wiesenthal's memoirs and his interrogation in 1948 represent the truth accurately, this interrogation never took place, which makes the following sentence in his 1954 reparations application all the more interesting: "There [in the Lacki Gestapo prison] I was fearfully tortured by Unterscharführer Waltke and to put an end to these tortures, I cut open my veins" ("Dort wurde ich vom Unterscharführer Waldtke [sic] furchtbar gefoltert und um diese Folterungen ein Ende zu setzen, habe ich mir die Pulsadern aufgeschnitten"). [21]

How to account for the survival of a Jew caught with a gun and, to say the least, compromising documents? Is Wiesenthal's 1954 claim to have been tortured simply one more roccoco furbelow on his story of persecution, or do his other two accounts suppress an actual event which might have resulted in Wiesenthal's having been "turned," and thus spared as a Gestapo agent? (One can speculate on what might have been Wiesenthal's fate had he escaped once more to his alleged partisan unit and been trapped in such contradictions about his treatment in the hands of the German secret police.)

'I Didn't Wish to Die ...'

Wiesenthal's 1954 story of his recovery from his suicide attempt and his evacuation from Lvov in July 1944 is short and simple. After his torture by Waltke:

Although it was somewhat unusual, I was admitted to the prison hospital and was delivered on March 19, 1944 to the Lemberg [Lvov] Concentration Camp, which was just being established. There were in all about 100 inmates and a larger camp guard, which, under the leadership of Hauptsturmführer Warzok, preferred not to go to the front. In the camp I carried out small tasks for the camp command and the camp kitchen until July 19, 1944.

On July 19, 1944-it was about 10 days before the Russian entry into Lvov -- the camp was evacuated ...

(Obwohl es etwas ungewöhnlich war, kam ich in das Gefängnishospital und wurde am 19. März 1944 in das sich neu formierende Konzentrationslager Lemberg eingeliefert. Es waren im ganzen c. 100 verschiedene Häftlinge und eine grössere KZ-Bewachung, die es unter der Leitung von Hauptsturmführer Warzok, vorgezogen hat, nicht an die Front zu gehen. In dem Lager verrichtete ich kleine Arbeiten für die Lagerkommandatur und KZ-Küche bis zum 19. Juli 1944.

Am 19. Juli 1944 -- es waren ungefähr 10 Tage vor dem russischen Einmarsch nach Lemberg-wurde das Lager evakuiert . .) [22]

This dry account omits a dramatic incident recounted in both Wiesenthal's memoirs and in his 1948 interrogation, whereby the "Nazi"-hunter narrowly escaped execution thanks to a providential Soviet aerial attack.

According to *The Murderers Among Us*, Wiesenthal was to be tortured at last by the fiendish Waltke on July 17, on which day he and the other prisoners were summoned to the prison courtyard. There Wiesenthal was assigned to a group of non-Jews slated for execution. Wiesenthal describes what happened next as follows:

"We were probably going to be buried in a large mass grave," Wiesenthal remembers. "I looked at the others the way some people on an airplane look at their fellow travelers. If there should be a crash, they are thinking, these will be one's companions in death. On the other side of the courtyard I saw a group of Jews. I wished I could be buried with them, not with the Poles and Ukrainians, but how could I get there? Suddenly there was a roar in the sky above us, and an explosion shook the courtyard. From Sapieha Street a cloud of fire and smoke went up into the air. The files from the tables were scattered all over the courtyard, and there was terrific confusion. I quickly ran across the courtyard and joined the Jews. A minute later two SS men put us on a truck and brought us back to the Janowska [i.e., Lemberg] concentration camp." [\[23\]](#)

Herewith the same incident in his sworn statements of 1948:

On July 20 I was to be released from the prison hospital. We were taken to the prison yard, where the entire Gestapo and the SS and Police-Leader of Galicia were. They sorted us out according to the crime[s] we were charged with. In this way I was immediately selected for death, as a partisan chief ...

On the same day on which we stood in the yard, 11 o'clock in the morning, where unexpectedly there was a Soviet attack and some bombs fell, there arose confusion and a cloud of dust of about 200 meters [in height?]. The Gestapo gentlemen ran away immediately and a small group stood there. I didn't wish to die and exploited this confusion and ran the 20 steps to this Jewish group. We were all driven once again into the jail and I together with this group. Then there was an air alarm. An auto with sirens was driven around for this purpose. After an hour there was again an all-clear. Then it was, Jews out. A car came from Lemberg Concentration Camp to pick up the Jews.

(Am 20. Juli sollte ich vom Gefaengnisspital entlassen werden. Am 16. Juli kam die Sowjetische [sic] Offensive. Wir wurden auf den Gefaengnishof geholt, wo die gesamte Gestapo und der SS-u. Polizeiführer von Galyzien war. Die haben uns sortiert, je nach dem Verbrechen, das uns zur Last gelegt wurde. Auf diese [sic] Weise wurde ich sofort aussortiert zum Tode, als Partisanenhauptling ...

An demselben Tag, wo wir im Hof standen, 11 Uhr vormittags, wo unverhofft ein sowjetischer Angriff war und einige Bomben fielen, entstand ein Durcheinander und eine Staubwolke von ungefähr 200 m. Die Gestapo-Herren liefen gleich weg und da stand eine kleine Gruppe. Ich wünschte nicht, dass ich sterben sollte und habe dieses Durcheinander ausgenutzt und bin diese 20 Schritte zu dieser jüdischen Gruppe gelaufen. Dann war Fliegeralarm. Es ist zu diesem Zweck ein Auto mit Sirenen herumgefahren. Nach einer Stunde wurde wieder Entwarnung. Dann hieß es, Juden raus. Es kam ein Auto vom K.L. Lemberg, um die Juden abzuholen.) [\[24\]](#)

For what it's worth, then, Simon Wiesenthal's sworn testimony of 1948 is that he was saved

because he was a Jew as late as July 1944!

Conclusions

A sustained comparison of his several accounts of his evacuation westward, all of them differing in numerous particulars, will not be undertaken here. The purpose of this brief study has been to make an internal criticism of Wiesenthal's credibility on his war years as reflected in several authoritative accounts he has provided of them, two of them sworn documents and the other his published memoirs.

The evident fact that Wiesenthal has more than once altered his story of the six most important years of his life must be considered in connection with his credibility as a "Nazi"-hunter. The ongoing and intensifying hunt for World-War-II criminals (so long as they were Germans, or German allies, accused of mistreating Jews or Communists) has brought to grief more than one man unable to account for what he was doing, in minute detail, forty-five years ago.

Thus John Demjanjuk, whose inability to remember in precisely which prison camp or holding pen he was held in at any given date contributed to his framing as "Iivan the Terrible" in Jerusalem. So Frank Walus, the wartime forced laborer from Poland whom Wiesenthal claimed to have documented as a member of the Gestapo until such humanitarians as Jerome Brentar of Cleveland were able to unearth insurance records which proved otherwise. It is time that competent authorities, in the United States and elsewhere, made a determined effort to establish the facts of Simon Wiesenthal's wartime career, by whatever means necessary. It is suggested that this time, if Mr. Wiesenthal is deposed under oath, appropriate penalties be imposed for deliberate misstatements.

Editor's Note: This article appeared in slightly different form in [The Journal of Historical Review](#), vol. 8, no. 4.

Notes

[1]The Wiesenthal interrogation is contained on one of the 91 rolls at the Archives entitled "Records of the U.S. Nuernberg War Crimes Trials Interrogations, 1946-1949" (Copy 1019, No. 79). These 91 rolls contain nearly 15,000 pretrial interrogation transcripts of over 2,250 individuals, conducted by the Interrogation Branch of the Evidence Division of the Office, Chief of Counsel for War Crimes (OCCWC). The orthography of the transcript, which among other things indicates the umlaut with the letter "e" rather than by the dieresis, has been followed above. :

[2]This statement, "Eidesstattliche Erklfirung uber die Zeit meiner Verfolgung," has been published in Simon Wiesenthal: Dokumentation, by Robert Drechsler, Vienna: Dokumente zur Zeitgeschichte, 1/1982 (July, 1982). Drechsler's account of Wiesenthal's life presents much useful information, particularly in regard to Wiesenthal's sustained legal squabbles with Bruno Kreisky and others, including Drechsler himself. The document cited was submitted to the "State Pension Board" (Landesrentenbehörde in Dusseldorf (North Rhine/Westphalia), is dated August 24, 1954, and bears Wiesenthal's address in Linz, Austria.

[3]The Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs by Simon Wiesenthal (edited and with an introductory profile by Joseph Wechsberg, New York; Bantam Books, third printing, 1973. Following the usage in the title, we have referred to this book as Wiesenthal's "memoirs"; purists might style it his "authorized biography." Perhaps it could be said to lie somewhere between the two genres.

[4]The Murderers Among Us, p. 25.

[5]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 27,1948,p.1.

[6]According to historian Richard C. Lucas, at the time of the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in 1939, "Jews in cities and towns displayed Red flags to welcome Soviet troops, helped to disarm Polish soldiers, and filled administrative positions in Soviet-occupied Poland ... The Soviets with Jewish help shipped off the Polish intelligentsia to the depths of the Soviet Union. Some monasteries and convents were turned over to the Jews." *The Forgotten Holocaust*, Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986,p.128. The new rulers of Lvov and their Jewish helpers were just as unwelcome to the city's Ukrainians.

[7]*The Murderers Among Us*, p. 28f.

[8]*The Murderers Among Us*, p. 29.

[9]"Eidesstattliche Erklärung über die Zeit meiner Verfolgung," in Drechsler, Simon Wiesenthal, p. 133.

[10]In Drechsler, Simon Wiesenthal, p. 135.

[11]*The Murderers Among Us*, pp. 33ff.

[12]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 27, 1948,p.2.

[13]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28, 1948,p.2.

[14]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28, 1948, p.2.

[15]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28, 1948,p. 5.

[16]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28, 1948,p.4.

[17]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28,1948,p.4f.

[18]*The Murderers Among Us*, p. 35.

[19]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28,1948,p. 5.

[20]*The Murderers Among Us*, p. 35.

[21]In Drechsler, Simon Wiesenthal, p. 133f.

[22]In Drechsler, Simon Wiesenthal, p. 134.

[23]*The Murderers Among Us*, p. 36f.

[24]Interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal, May 28,1948,p. 6

Chapter 2: New Light on a Dark Past

The Institute for Historical Review has recently obtained from the U.S. National Archives a copy of a document dating from 1945 that provides new evidence that famed "Nazi hunter" Simon Wiesenthal collaborated with the Soviet Union during the Second World War. [1] The author of the document, a "curriculum vitae" submitted to American military authorities at the former concentration camp at Mauthausen, in Upper Austria, is Wiesenthal himself. He claims in this autobiographical statement that he served the Soviet occupation regime in the east Galician city of Lwów (today Lviv) as an engineer and was well rewarded for his services to the Communist government. Wiesenthal's 1945 account offers strong corroboration of a sworn statement he made to U.S. authorities in 1948, first published in the *Journal of Historical Review*, that he had functioned as a "Soviet chief engineer" in Lwów during the 1939-41 Soviet occupation. [2]

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Wiesenthal twice contradicted what would later become his standard story of his time in Soviet-ruled Lwów: that he was forced to work as a poorly paid factory mechanic and narrowly escaped deportation to the interior of the USSR. The "curriculum vitae" and accompanying documents provided by Wiesenthal in 1945 contain additional statements that contradict important aspects of Wiesenthal's standard account of his war years. These records are of further interest in that they provide the first documentary evidence of Wiesenthal's career as a denouncer and tracker of alleged German war criminals.

Lwów: The Missing Years

On May 25, 1945, some three weeks after American forces had captured the camp, the recently liberated inmate Simon Wiesenthal submitted his "curriculum vitae" and a list of ninety-one men and women he alleged were guilty of war crimes to the "U.S. Camp Commander, Camp Mauthausen." In an accompanying cover letter, Wiesenthal, writing with the restraint that was to become his trademark, claimed: "Many of these have caused incalculable sufferings to myself as well as to my fellow inmates," and went on to state: "Many of these I have personally seen commit murder phantastic in number and method." The list of "war criminals" itself, and Wiesenthal's efforts to identify, characterize, and accuse them, will be considered briefly below. Because it is "Ing. Szymon Wiesenthal," as he signed these documents nearly fifty-seven years ago, who is under investigation here, his statements about himself rather than about his quarry are of chief interest.

Wiesenthal opens the "curriculum vitae" (actually closer in form to a short autobiography than a standard c.v.) that accompanied his other submissions with a brief and seemingly unremarkable paragraph about his origins and education. The next paragraph reads:

After the outbreak of the war I stayed in Lemberg and after the entry of the Red Army continued my work as a construction engineer and a designer of refrigerating plants and other various constructions as well as private dwellings. During this period I invented an artificial insulation material for which the Soviet Government awarded me a premium of 25,000 rubles.

These two sentences supply more concrete detail regarding Simon Wiesenthal's work, status, and relationship to the Soviet authorities during the twenty-one months the USSR occupied Lemberg (as Lviv is known in German) than any other statement or account by Wiesenthal that has appeared to date. As noted above, Wiesenthal's 1948 testimony to a U.S. Army interrogator lends corroboration to his 1945 statement and provides further details about his activities from September 1939 to mid-1941: "Active until 1939 in Poland as a professional engineer architect [sic], between 1939-1941 Soviet chief engineer employed in Lemberg and Odessa. 10 days prior to the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia I returned to Lemberg, where I experienced the German entry." Wiesenthal's express claim to have been a "Soviet [emphasis added] chief engineer" is telling in itself. If, as he states, he worked in Odessa, some three hundred miles away in Soviet Ukraine, then he enjoyed travel privileges afforded only a few inhabitants of the occupied lands of prewar eastern Poland. The only USSR destination for most citizens of Poland during the first Soviet occupation was the Gulag.

Simon Wiesenthal's 1967 "memoirs," *The Murderers among Us*, strongly contradict his claims of 1945 and 1948. [3] *Murderers* has the following to say about his employment in Communist-ruled Lwów: "By the middle of September, the Red Army was in Lwow, and again Wiesenthal found himself 'liberated[.]'... The Wiesenthals managed to stay in Lwow, but Wiesenthal's days as an independent architect were over. He was glad to find a badly paid job as a mechanic in a factory that produced bedsprings." [4]

If what Wiesenthal said in his statements from 1945 and 1948 about his employment, status, and means under the Soviets is correct, [5] then there are other questions to be answered on the full extent of his activities and affinities in Lwów from 1939 to 1941. Was he a member of the Communist party? Did he acquire Soviet citizenship? Did he take part in the persecution of the city's Polish and Ukrainian Christian majority? And why was Wiesenthal -- apparently trusted by the Soviets, capable, and with vital skills -- not evacuated with the Red Army, as were so many others, when it abandoned Lwów in mid-1941?

Saved by the Bells?

One of the most famous tales from the Wiesenthal canon describes his arrest and hair's breadth escape from execution at the hands of Ukrainian auxiliary police a few days after the arrival of the Wehrmacht. As recounted in *The Murderers among Us*, [6] on the afternoon of July 6, 1941, a Sunday, Wiesenthal was arrested by a Ukrainian policeman and brought to Lwów's Brigidki prison. In Wiesenthal's telling, after about forty Jews had been collected in the prison courtyard, the Ukrainians lined them up and began shooting them, one by one. Wiesenthal relates that the killers feasted on sausages and swilled down vodka between murders. The memoirs relate: "The shots and the shouts of the dying men were getting closer to Wiesenthal. He remembers that he stood looking at the gray wall without really seeing it. Suddenly he heard the sounds of church bells, and a Ukrainian voice shouted 'Enough! Evening mass!'" That night, his account continues, Wiesenthal was rescued thanks to a chance encounter in his cell with a Polish acquaintance serving in the Ukrainian auxiliary police. The policeman devised an audacious plan: he would tell the other police that Wiesenthal was a Soviet spy, and that he had to bring him before a Ukrainian commissioner elsewhere in the city. Although Wiesenthal claims to have been badly beaten, the friendly policeman was able to lead him and another "spy" (a friend of Wiesenthal's) out of the prison, and -- "after a series of narrow escapes" -- both men were back home the next morning.

Wiesenthal's concededly laconic account in the 1945 curriculum vitae clearly contradicts the story told in his memoirs. He writes:

When after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war that city was taken by the German troops, I was immediately arrested on July 13, 1941, as one of the Jewish intelligentsia. Of independent means, through a bribery I succeeded in getting out of prison.

In this 1945 version, less than four years after the purported event, Wiesenthal's arrest comes a week later than in his memoirs. Here he attributes his release from prison to a bribe, rather than to a chance encounter and the implied altruism and sang-froid of a Polish friend. Although in this document and the 1948 interrogation Wiesenthal describes countless atrocities he claims to have suffered or witnessed, they mention no festive shootings by Ukrainian auxiliary police.

Wiesenthal's 1948 testimony strengthens the presumption against his miraculous escape from a Ukrainian massacre by omitting any mention of an incarceration in July 1941. Instead, he tells this story: "On 8 July I was forcibly removed from my residence by two soldiers and a Ukrainian auxiliary policeman -- a group of about sixty Jews, who had been similarly dragged from their homes, was waiting on the street; we moved slowly down the street, because new Jews were continually brought from their homes. When there were around 100 or 120 of us, we were brought to the German army railroad yards, where the army engineers awaited us. We were forced to run the gauntlet and nearly every one of us received a kick or the lash of a whip." Wiesenthal goes on to state that he continued to work as a forced laborer at the railroad yards, returning home nights, for at least the following two weeks.

Jewish apologists understandably make much of various scurrilous stories, oftentimes quite untrue, that have been directed at the Jews over the centuries. In the light of Wiesenthal's testimony from 1945 and 1948, which contradicts as well as omits the dramatic account of his escape from the Ukrainian bloodbath, might the story in his memoirs be a carefully crafted "blood libel" against Ukrainians -- and their church?

A Charmed Life?

While the evidence of Wiesenthal's 1945 and 1948 statements points toward his having collaborated with the Communists during the war, Wiesenthal has more frequently been accused of collaborating with the Germans than with the Soviets. [7] While published evidence of such collaboration remains scarce, interesting questions arise from his different accounts of certain wartime experiences -- such as his strange and conflicting stories about his recapture and subsequent treatment by the Germans in 1944.

Wiesenthal is consistent in his claims to have escaped from German custody in Lwów in 1943. [8]

His accounts of how he spent his several months of freedom differ, however. While in his memoirs he claims merely to have hidden from the Germans, in his 1945 curriculum vitae Wiesenthal wrote that he had joined and fought in the ranks of "Jewish partisans." In the 1948 interrogation he testified that he had been a major with the partisans, specializing in designing bunkers and fortifications, and strongly implied that his group had Soviet backing.

He claims to have been recaptured in June 1944. In the 1945 curriculum vitae, he provides this version of what happened:

It was while I was fighting in the partisan ranks against the Nazis that we managed to collect and bury for safekeeping considerable amount [sic] of evidence and other materials proving the crimes committed by Nazis. When the partisans were dispersed by the Germans I fled to Lemberg on February 10, 1944, and again went [sic] into hiding. On June 13, 1944, I was found during a house to house search and was immediately sent to the famous Lacki camp, near that city. Since there was no escape for the partisans who were caught, I attempted suicide by cutting the veins on my arms but was saved.

The 1945 statement does not explain how, as a Jew and a partisan, he was "saved" while in the custody of the German security forces. Wiesenthal had an answer for that question in his 1948 interrogation, however. He testified: "On 13 June 1944 we were in this bunker [in Lwów -- Ed.]. ... A search for arms was carried out and we were discovered. We were in a position where we could not even make use of our own arms...." After being arrested, Wiesenthal states: "I immediately cut open my artery. We were taken to the Lonsky prison and they found some of my records. We had been waiting every day for a Soviet offensive, so we made certain records at this time concerning the whole partisan area where we were. These notes were in our possession, and I owe it specially to this circumstance that I was not killed right away as so many other Jews, for these records seemed to be very valuable and therefore [sic] I was taken into a prison hospital after my attempted suicide." Thus, according to Wiesenthal's 1948 account, he was not merely a Jew and a partisan, but an armed Jewish partisan. Inasmuch as the Red Army was driving toward the city at that time (the Germans abandoned Lwów a month later), it is difficult to understand how a partisan officer and specialist caught with partisan documents was, at the least, not speedily interrogated -- rather than being allowed to recuperate in a hospital for over a month, as Wiesenthal states elsewhere in the 1948 interrogation.

As noted above, there is nothing about Wiesenthal's having been a partisan in his memoirs. Nonetheless, *Murderers among Us* states that he was captured with a pistol (for which surely he would have been dealt with as a partisan), and "a diary [he] had kept and a list of SS guards and their crimes that he'd compiled, believing that one day it might be useful." [9] Although the memoirs report that the pistol was immediately stolen by one of the arresting officers for sale on the black market (if Wiesenthal correctly divined his purpose), in this account Wiesenthal is nonetheless caught with a sheaf of juicy allegations against individual German officers for eventual

presentation to the Allies at some later day.

Once again, Wiesenthal is not only spared, but by his account never interrogated. He claims to have evaded torture by twice attempting suicide -- first by cutting his wrists, then by attempting to hang himself. After he has been hospitalized and fattened up on a fortifying diet, however, on July 15, 1944, the day appointed for his interrogation, the Germans seem to forget Wiesenthal's diary and list: the Red Army is drawing near, and Wiesenthal is sent westward with a contingent of Jewish prisoners. [\[10\]](#)

Whatever is to be made of the discrepancies and improbabilities touched on above, it is worth noting that in each of the above tellings one of the most prominent "survivors" of Hitler's alleged attempt to exterminate the Jews has acknowledged that he survived circumstances which, given an extermination policy, should have guaranteed his speedy death. [\[11\]](#) And, given the various implausibilities in his several accounts, the suspicion arises that Wiesenthal was in fact interrogated, raising the question: if so, why has he chosen to deny it?

Falsus in Uno ...?

A venerable legal saw has it, "Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus," meaning, more or less, "Once a liar, always a liar." The objection to that is that many people sometimes tell lies, yet that doesn't mean that they always lie, let alone that their speaking a truth makes it untrue. Clearly, the less stringent interpretation must govern the evaluation of personal testimony, including that of Simon Wiesenthal. Nonetheless, often enough Wiesenthal gives us pause.

In his 1945 c.v. Wiesenthal declares: "It was during this time that my life was several times placed in extreme danger, and that I lost both of my parents who were killed by the Nazis." In the accompanying cover letter, he writes: "With all of the members of my family and of my nearest relatives killed by the Nazis, I am asking of your kindness to place me at the disposal of the U.S. authorities investigating the war crimes."

Wiesenthal's memoirs, however, after noting that his father served in the Austrian army during the First World War, state unambiguously: "He was killed in action in 1915." [\[12\]](#) Might Wiesenthal have been referring in his 1945 statement to his step-father, then? Not according to his memoirs: "Wiesenthal's stepfather was taken to a Soviet prison, where he soon died." [\[13\]](#) Wiesenthal is silent on the fate of his parents in his sworn statement of 1948.

Studying Wiesenthal's false attribution of his father's death to the Germans in 1945 (doubtless to gain sympathy from the Americans) and the many other contradictions in his testimony tempts one to augment the categories of the legists with a new one: "falsus in pluribus."

Wiesenthal's List

The list of alleged war criminals Wiesenthal offered the American forces fills four pages, and is the first hard evidence of his Nazi-hunting activities. Deprived of the list he claims that he buried in the forest (or that perhaps the Gestapo had confiscated from him), Wiesenthal was forced to rely on his own prodigious memory, with consequences that will be noted below. There is no evidence that Wiesenthal testified in the trial of anyone designated on the roster, which as will be seen gives little hard data as to specific misdeeds of those listed, and few clues as to their whereabouts. Nonetheless, Wiesenthal's list serves to anticipate his career as a gifted publicist of atrocity allegations -- and may provide hints about certain of his wartime doings.

In the brief heading that introduces the list of ninety-one names, Wiesenthal writes: "The following is a brief list of SS men and Gestapo agents as well as Nazi party members whom I had the opportunity of seeing to partake in murder and other crimes against human life." The list is divided into two groups, those whom Wiesenthal had encountered (or perhaps heard of) in "District Galicia (Lemberg)" and those in "Camp Cracow-Plashow" [sic].

Wiesenthal makes many accusations of mass murder (added up, the death toll he ascribes to his ninety-one Nazis comes to about 1,150,000), but gives details on very few of the crimes he alleges: in fact he names the date and place of a specific crime in only three instances. Thus, while Wiesenthal claims that someone he calls simply "Krieger, Maj. Gen. SS" (probably Obergruppenführer Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger) "On Aug. 18, 1941 finished personally 13,000 people by shooting," and that four officers "Killed 7,000 on Nov. 18, 1943 in Lwów," usually he favors the diachronic perspective: "Killed 1,200 Jews in his shop, Lemberg" (of Georg Gross, "chief of the Lemberg railway shops"); "Killed 8,000 Jews in Tarnopol alone" (of "Rokita," said to be an Untersturmführer); "Greatest killer of all. His victims run into thousands" (of "Amond [sic] Goeth," commander of the Plaszow camp near Cracow); "Responsible for several thousands of deaths" (of someone designated simply as "Hasse"); or "Ditto" (of "Kipko, Untersturmführer" who follows "Hasse" on the list).

Despite its lack of precise information on specific misdeeds, Wiesenthal's list abounds in concrete characterizations of those he accuses. His only accusation against one "Scherner" (perhaps Julian Scherner, who served as SS- und Polizeiführer of the Cracow district) is "Killed sick in the hospital," while "Hujar Untersturmführer" is described as "Winner of numerous wagers by sending one bullet through two heads at a time" and "Lied," said to be an Unterscharführer, is called a "Degenrat [sic] collector of his victims' skulls." In some cases Wiesenthal takes care to specify exact methods, a few of which sound like categories in a hellish Holocaust Oscar night: "Worst sadist and killer using ax only," others of which sound simply foolish: "The last two specialized in hanging and chopping men alive." There are many lesser or vaguer accusations ("Camp's recorder. Many cruelties"; "Introduced keenest sadism"; "'Worked' in Bohemia"), while about twenty persons on the list are not accused of committing any crime. The list shows glimmerings of its author's knack for devising colorful nicknames for the headlines, but Wiesenthal was as yet short of mastery, e.g. of one "Engels, Gestapokommissar": "Timekeeper and schedule maker for mass killing throughout Galicia."

Although the implication of the heading is that Wiesenthal witnessed many of the misdeeds of those he lists ("whom I had the opportunity of seeing to partake in murder and other crimes against human life"), he is explicit about witnessing only one crime, the alleged shooting of thirteen men with American passports "on [sic] August, 1944."

Seemingly deficient as hard evidence of criminal acts, the Wiesenthal list would also seem not to have been very helpful in locating the 91 persons it enumerates. Although Wiesenthal provides rank or (sometimes general) office for some 70 of those listed, he is able to supply the first names (and in one instance simply an initial) of a mere 18 of them. Forty-two of the alleged war criminals are identified by their hometowns or places of origin, but nearly all these refer simply to cities (while 2 are said to be from "Holland," and 3 from the Batschka region, at that time occupied by Hungary). Only 5 listings mention streets, and of those just 2 give specific addresses. And Wiesenthal is able to identify the civilian occupations of only 12 of the 91 listed, and those of an additional 3 of their relatives.

It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt properly to identify the 91 persons on Wiesenthal's list, let alone whether they committed the crimes alleged by Wiesenthal, or what became of those of them who actually existed. An analysis of Wiesenthal's list yields data of possible significance in

reconstructing certain of its author's wartime associations, however. Wiesenthal identifies 13 of those listed as "Gestapo agent[s]," 8 of whom he places in Lemberg/Galicia, the other 5 in Cracow/Plaszow. For the remaining 78 persons listed he is able to provide 10 first names and 1 first initial (14.1 percent); 34 places of origin (43.6 percent); and 10 civilian occupations, including two of family members (12.8 percent). For his 13 alleged Gestapo agents, however, Wiesenthal gives 7 first names (53.8 percent); 9 places of origin (69.2 percent); and 5 civilian occupations, including that of one in-law (38.5 percent). Wiesenthal's assignment of a military or police rank to only one of the 13 designated as Gestapo agents (in contrast to the other 78, for 54 of whom, among them Gestapo officers, he lists military or police ranks) strengthens the implication of the term "agent" that these were undercover operatives, whether military or civilian. That Wiesenthal is able to provide so many more particulars for such shadowy figures than he can for the more readily recognizable officers and NCOs he names would seem to add weight to the suspicion that Wiesenthal was himself an agent of the Gestapo.

Wiesenthal beneath the Whitewash

As is well known, Simon Wiesenthal has been the object of something approaching a cult since the 1960s. His skillful packaging of vengeance disguised as justice and his (often invented) adventures on the trail of euphoniously nicknamed Nazi supercriminals have made him a hero throughout the Western world. While he has had his detractors, including Israeli diplomats and intelligence operatives, Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky, and the Institute for Historical Review, their voices have been all but drowned out by a tidal wave of media acclaim. [14] Within the Holocaust industry, a sizable Wiesenthal industry has long flourished: there are dozens of books by and about Wiesenthal, he has been depicted in numerous films, both documentary and fictional; and the Los Angeles foundation that pays for the use of his name has raked in tens of millions of dollars in contributions and government grants.

Nonetheless, there is compelling evidence that at least one of Wiesenthal's recent biographers had access to the documents that Wiesenthal composed in 1945. In Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice, Hella Pick discloses that Wiesenthal submitted a list of ninety-one names, dated May 25, 1945, to U.S. Army authorities at Mauthausen. Pick quotes virtually the entire text of Wiesenthal's covering letter -- with the notable exception of its last sentence: "To furnish you with the personal data regarding my person, a brief curriculum vitae is attached." In fact, while the author cites most of the heading, or introduction, to Wiesenthal's list, and quotes freely and accurately from various of its accusations, she makes no mention whatsoever of the curriculum vitae, which follows the cover letter and precedes the list of war criminals in the Cracow war crimes case file in which the 1945 documents are contained. [15] Nor does the author refer to this document in any of the corresponding passages of her account of Wiesenthal's life under the Soviets, or during the rest of the war. [16]

While Hella Pick and other biographers may have suppressed the evidence of Wiesenthal's wartime collaboration and general duplicity revealed in the 1945 letter, list, and c.v., that is surely less important than the massive gullibility exhibited by Wiesenthal's vast audience of admirers throughout his long career. If Pick is audacious enough to quote, approvingly, Wiesenthal's claim that "My memory in those days was excellent" immediately after her account of his 1945 statements, [17] doesn't such calculation accurately mirror the credulity, apathy, and sloth of the wider public? For nearly forty years now his unending "hunt" for one category of alleged criminal and his defiance of due process and historical accuracy have brought Wiesenthal the highest national honors that governments can bestow as well as the uncritical adulation of multitudes.

Wiesenthal's long life is reportedly nearing its end, leaving little hope for a thorough investigation and exposure of his actual past before his death. That should by no means preclude such an inquiry

by a competent group of researchers in the years to come. Punching through the lacquered facade of the Wiesenthal myth to reveal the rot behind it would uncover at least some of the decay at work throughout Western society, past and present. And, even after Wiesenthal is gone, establishing his actual behavior during the war would likely bring the Nazi hunter's reputation down a rung or two, for facts are the nemesis of "memory."

Editor's Note: This article appeared in slightly different form in *The Journal of Historical Review*, vol. 21, no. 1.

Notes

1. Memorandum from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces. Subject: war crimes, 6 July 1945. Folder 000-50-59, Records of Headquarters U.S. Army Europe (USAEUR), War Crimes Branch, Record Group 338, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland. A recent biography quotes Wiesenthal to the effect that he wrote the original documents in Polish the English versions held by the National Archives bear his name, and he has made no attempt to disavow authorship. See Hella Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), pp. 84-5.
2. Interrogation no. 2820. Records of the Interrogation Division of the Evidence Branch of the Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes, Record Group 238, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1019, roll 79, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland. Wiesenthal's 1948 interrogation took place on May 27 and 28, ostensibly in investigation of alleged crimes by the Wehrmacht. The interrogation was conducted in German; the extracts in this article were translated by the editor, and occasionally differ from translations in the article "New Documents Raise Doubts As to Simon Wiesenthal's War Years," in the *Journal of Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1988-89), pp. 489-503.
3. Simon Wiesenthal, *The Murderers among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs*, ed. Joseph Wechsberg (New York: Bantam, 1968). (The original edition was published in New York by McGraw-Hill in 1967.) While this book somewhat peculiarly combines first-person accounts of Wiesenthal's Nazi-hunting derring-do with four chapters that relate Wiesenthal's life story "as told to [editor Joseph] Wechsberg" (p. vi), it may be presumed that the biographical section has met with Wiesenthal's approval.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
5. It is worthy of note that each of two recent admiring biographies of Wiesenthal, while attempting to sustain Wiesenthal's later claim to have been a bedsprings mechanic victimized by the Communists, states that he worked for a time as an architectural engineer in Odessa during the Soviet occupation. See Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, pp. 48-9, and Alan Levy, *The Wiesenthal File* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1994), pp. 33-4. Both books are said to be based on extensive interviews of Wiesenthal; neither account of his activities in Soviet-ruled Lwów provides any reference to documents or transcripts of the interviews.
6. *Murderers*, pp. 26-27.
7. For example, Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky, a Jew and an inmate of Nazi concentration camps, claimed that Wiesenthal collaborated with the Gestapo during the war. See his statement in Mark Weber, "Simon Wiesenthal: Fraudulent Nazi Hunter," *JHR* 15, no. 4 (July-August 1995), pp.

9-10.

8. See Murderers, pp. 33-34; 1948 interrogation; 1945 c.v.

9. Murderers, p. 34.

10. Ibid., 35-7.

11. In another sworn statement, this one an application for reparations to a state pension board in Düsseldorf dating from 1954 ("Eidesstattliches Erklärung über die Zeit meiner Verfolgung," in Robert Drechsler, Simon Wiesenthal: Dokumentation [Vienna: n.p., 1982], Dokumente zur Zeitgeschichte 1/1982), Wiesenthal claims that he was tortured (presumably to gain information) just after his capture, but escaped by cutting his wrists and being taken to the hospital. Wiesenthal's willingness to contradict his other accounts on this detail might be explained by his desire to obtain reparation monies. This statement contains no information about his time under Soviet occupation.

12. Murderers, p. 23.

13. Murderers, p. 25.

14. Mark Weber, "Simon Wiesenthal: Fraudulent Nazi Hunter," JHR 15, no. 4 (July-August 1995), *passim*.

15. Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, pp. 85/6.

16. Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, pp. 48-73, *passim*. According to Pick (p. 85) the well-known screenwriter Abby Mann (Judgement at Nuremberg) consulted the Wiesenthal documents from 1945 at the National Archives while researching his Emmy Award-winning script for the 1989 television miniseries *Murderers among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Story*. Although we have not seen the miniseries, reports make clear that Mann, who befriended Wiesenthal while a U.S. Army lieutenant at Mauthausen in 1945, omitted anything seriously jarring to the legend in his script.

17. Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, pp. 85.

Chapter 3: The Soviet Past of Simon Wiesenthal

Researchers associated with the Committee for Open Debate of the Holocaust have gathered evidence which raises serious questions as to Simon Wiesenthal's past associations with the Soviet Union. Most of this evidence appears to stem from Simon Wiesenthal himself, and it points to Wiesenthal's voluntary cooperation with Soviet authorities on more than one occasion and for considerable periods of time. Furthermore, the evidence--developed from biographies favorable to Wiesenthal and from an official U.S. document--indicates that the famous "Nazi hunter" held positions of trust and authority under the Soviets, at the apogee of Joseph Stalin's rule of terror in the decade 1934-1944.

Simon Wiesenthal is doubtless our century's most noted advocate of a justice without statutory or territorial limitations, and its most honored champion of remembering past crimes rather than forgiving or forgetting. He boasts of tracking down and exposing more than a thousand alleged Nazi war criminals; the well-financed and publicity-savvy center that bears his name specializes

not only in bedeviling aging veterans of the SS, but in working to muzzle and censor revisionist scholars and activists around the globe. Only a few weeks ago, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's representative in Canada, Sol Littman, succeeded in getting local authorities to cancel, a revisionist gathering in Oliver, British Columbia. At around the same time, the SWC's "dean," Rabbi Marvin Hier, began a campaign to "bring to justice" Canadian immigrants from Ukraine who fought with Hitler's Germans against Stalin's Soviets over half a century ago. .

Soviet Simon?

For all Wiesenthal's evocation of "memory" and his ruthless delving into others' pasts, he has been hazy about aspects of his own career, and for much of his life very careful about revealing himself to biographers. The lingering suspicion that has most often found expression by his critics, whether Austria's late social democratic premier Bruno Kreisky or opponents on the far right:, is that he collaborated with his captors from the Gestapo. It is all the more strange, therefore, that in a sworn statement given to a U.S. interrogator in 1948 and in two recent:, friendly biographies by Wiesenthal intimates, there emerges strong indication that Simon Wiesenthal:

- "apprenticed as a building engineer" for a period of twenty-one months in Soviet-ruled Kiev and Odessa in 1934-35;
- was "a Soviet chief engineer" in Lviv and Odessa in 1939-1941;
- and served as a major in a Soviet-controlled partisan force in 1943-44.

Evidence for the above is supplied by a recent, friendly biography of Simon Wiesenthal, *The Wiesenthal File* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), by Alan Levy, with whom the famed Nazi-hunter closely cooperated, as well as by a 1948 interrogation of Wiesenthal first noted by *The Journal of Historical Review* a decade ago.

A Soviet Apprentice?

Until Levy's book, the years 1934-35 remained a blank in accounts of Simon Wiesenthal's life, including the closest thing to a published biography of Simon Wiesenthal before 1993, Joseph Wechsberg's "introductory profile" in Wiesenthal's 1967 *The Murderers among Us* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill).

Levy writes in *The Wiesenthal File*: "In 1934 and 1935, Wiesenthal apprenticed as a building engineer in Soviet Russia. He spent a few weeks in Kharkov and Kiev, but most of those two years in the Black Sea port of Odessa...." (p. 31). Why Wiesenthal headed to the USSR to be "apprenticed," and why he chose to work with the Communist rulers in a Ukraine that had just been blasted by a double-headed holocaust of state-imposed famine and purge to the Gulag or the graveyard, his biographer does not reveal.

Soviet Chief Engineer?

According to evidence presented by Levy, the nearly two years Wiesenthal spent working in and for the USSR was followed four years later by a second such stint, 1939-41. For many years Wiesenthal represented this period, which coincided with the Soviet occupation of Lviv (Lemberg), where he was living after the Hitler-Stalin pact, as one of privation and near persecution for him and his family. According to *The Murderers among Us* Wiesenthal was able to obtain regular passports (thus evading deportation) for him and his family only by bribing the NKVD, and "He

was glad to find a badly paid job as a mechanic in a factory that produced bedsprings"(p. 27).

Ten years ago revisionist scholarship raised the first hard questions as to Wiesenthal's actual, Soviet past, as opposed to the cosmetics of his own "memory." In 1988 *The Journal of Historical Review* received a copy of a German-language interrogation of Simon Wiesenthal under American auspices in 1948, purporting to originate in the National Archives. Convinced the document was authentic, IHR published an analysis of it and other recently surfaced documents in the Winter 1988/89 *Journal of Historical Review* ("New Documents Raise New Doubts as to Simon Wiesenthal's War Years," pp. 489-503.)

According to that 1948 document, in answer to the question of what he did in Soviet-occupied territory before the June, 1941 German attack, Wiesenthal said that he had been: "...between 1939-1941 Soviet chief engineer in Lemberg [Lviv] and Odessa."

Levy's 1993 biography acknowledges the 1948 interrogation insofar as it draws on it for direct quotes regarding Wiesenthal's wartime activities--although it never cites the document by name (in fact, author Levy represents statements taken word for word from the 45-year old interrogation as if he'd gleaned them himself from Wiesenthal in recent conversation). One possible reason for this omission becomes evident when one reads (p. 34) that Wiesenthal was forced by the Reds to eke out a humble living in a bed springs factory. Of Wiesenthal's proud boast that he was a Soviet chief engineer, nary a mention--until we learn that following June 1940, "...an agricultural co-operative near Odessa needed outbuildings for feather-plucking, so Szymon returned twice to the city of his apprenticeship and worked his way up to chief engineer of the firm." (p. 34) (Context makes clear that the "firm" was a construction company [sic] in Lviv).

Another recent biography of Wiesenthal, Hella Pick's *Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in the Service of Justice* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), reveals that the U.S. Counter Intelligence Corps (which, the author discloses, conducted the 1948 interrogation of Wiesenthal in question) maintained a file on Wiesenthal. The CIC file included an Israeli intelligence report dating from 1952, which states (p. 49, in Pick *Simon Wiesenthal*):

Wiesenthal was taken into custody by the Soviets and transported to the Russian interior. After several months in a labor camp, he was put to work in a pen factory in Odessa. Later he advanced to the position of chief engineer. In some instances he was used as a technical adviser to the Ukrainian Ministry of Industry.

What are the facts, and who is to be trusted here? What functions was Soviet "Chief Engineer" Wiesenthal actually carrying out in Red-occupied Ukraine?

Soviet Partisan Major?

The 1990 *JHR* article dealt at length with contradictions in Wiesenthal's accounts of his time under the German occupation of Lvov, following his escape to the partisans, and after his recapture. Of interest here is his self professed activity as a partisan between about October 1943 and June 1944. The previously canonical Murderers among Us treats this entire period as one in which Wiesenthal merely hid from the Germans, in several different houses (p. 37). Levy's Wiesenthal File admits Wiesenthal's active service with the partisans, but is very vague on the question of his duties and responsibilities. It gives a distorted version of Wiesenthal's 1948 answer to the CIC on how he helped the partisans build bunkers and fortifications: "I was not so much a strategic expert as a technical expert" (p.50). What Wiesenthal actually said in 1948 about his partisan involvement 1943-44 is this: "I had a high rank I was immediately made a lieutenant on the basis of my intellect,

then was promoted to major, and finally the commander said, 'If you come through this alive, then you're a lieutenant colonel.' I helped very much in building bunkers and fortification lines. My rank [compare to Levy, above] was not so much as strategic expert as a technical expert." (*JHR*, p. 497).

Biographer Levy acknowledges what was suspected by the *JHR*: that Wiesenthal's guerrilla group was part of the Armia Ludowa (people's Army), in other words the Polish underground force that was armed by, paid by, and loyal to Moscow (p. 51).

To be sure, the above information does not yet constitute unimpeachable fact, and much of it is contradictory. CODOH's researchers have, so far, worked from secondary sources. Nevertheless, it begins to look like the Holocaust avenger with the allegedly elephantine memory for the wrongs of his prey has conveniently forgotten some very inconvenient episodes in his own past. CODOH doesn't have the answers, just yet, but it intends to find them out-and even as you read this CODOH is alerting well-placed individuals and groups in the U.S., Canada, and Europe to the questions that need to be answered about Simon Wiesenthal's Soviet past. The time has come to cure Wiesenthal of his personal amnesia, and that of his henchmen at the Wiesenthal Center (and in the Nazi-hunting industry in general) as to the crimes of non-Nazis, including their mentor's old friends in the Soviet. "Memory" shouldn't be a one-way street.

Editor's Note: This article appeared in slightly different form in *Smith's Report*, No. 53, April 1998.